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ABSTRACT

This paper questions Paul Harper's Fall 1984 "Journal of the Oklahoma Speech-Theatre-Communication Association" response to an article entitled "The 'Daily Oklahoman' and Persuasion in the Early 1980 Presidential Campaign." The paper argues that the response to the original article has two fundamental problems: (1) it raises some ethical questions about the role of a reviewer, and (2) the reviewers' overall logic is considerably weakened by recurring "straw man" arguments. The paper considers these issues and makes some conclusions. (Author/NKA)

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THE ROLE OF THE REVIEWER AND OTHER ETHICAL/LOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: A REJOINDER TO PAUL HARPER

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ABSTRACT

Paul Harper's fall 1984 JOSTCA response to "The Daily Oklahoman and Persuasion in the Early 1980 Presidential Campaign" has two fundamental problems. First, it raises some ethical questions about the role of the reviewer. Second, his overall logic is considerably weakened by recurring "straw man" arguments.

THE ROLE OF THE REVIEWER AND OTHER ETHICAL/LOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: A REJOINDER TO PAUL HARPER

In the fall 1984 issue of the Journal of the Oklahoma Speech-Theatre-Communication Association, Paul Harper chose to write and concurrently publish a response to our article: "The Daily Oklahoman and Persuasion in the Early 1980 Presidential Campaign." Such a response, in and of itself, is always a possible aftermath in the ritual of scholarship. However, the manner in which this particular response transpired was highly inappropriate. We would like to discuss some of the ethical as well as logical problems inherent in Harper's response.

As the authors of the original article, we were entitled to know the true nature of Harper's dissatisfaction with our essay prior to a published response. Instead, we were told by the editor of this issue that Harper (who initially was acting as a journal reviewer) was to write a brief response more of clarification than indictment. After repeated attempts to receive a copy of the actual journal, we finally obtained one more than two months after its initial distribution.

We also believe that Harper's detailed response was not an appropriate one in light of his role as a journal reviewer. Our experience with journal reviewers is that they are in a "constructive" critical role. Specifically, they are to assess manuscripts as acceptable, unacceptable, or in need of revision. Harper and his fellow reviewers chose to accept this article while allowing a reviewer (Harper) to put forth a rather extended response. If the true purpose of a journal is to promulgate scholarship, this is not the proper way to proceed.

A final ethical matter to consider is the seemingly confused rationale for publishing our article in the first place. Moreover, if our article/content analysis was "flawed in two major ways" as argued by respondent Harper, why in the world would reviewer Harper allow it to be published? Whether one is involved in publishing a state, regional, national, or international journal, we contend that the preceeding ethical matters need to be taken into consideration.

Paul Harper's response is further weakened by his recurring use of "straw man" arguments. Throughout his response, he inaccurately restates our initial position, and then proceeds to refute these nonexistent claims. For example, he indicts the "assumption upon which our paper is based" since we "imply that the editorial policies of the Daily Oklahoman had an influence upon the results of the 1980 presidential campaign in Oklahoma" (p. 43). Such an assumption was never made in our essay. In fact, we pursued an inductive method of inquiry explicitly stated as a "case study assessing the persuasive editorial trends of one isolated medium" (p. 27). Furthermore, we state in our concluding paragraph that our "investigation did not attempt to measure the reader's actual attitude change/reinforcement as a result of exposure to political editorials in the Daily Oklahoman" (p. 40). While we did allude in our final sentence to the "loud and clear" voice of the Daily Oklahoman, this was a mere literary device and certainly not the crux of our preceding analysis.

There are additional logical flaws in Harper's response. As he reviews the findings of Prisuta (1973), Gregg (1965), and McCombs (1967); Harper purports that there is nothing in this research "to suggest that the editorial policy of a single newspaper, in a brief time frame, will set a tone for an ensuing campaign or that it will impact upon voting patterns in a presidential election" (p. 45). For the most part, this research indictment is irrelevant to our essay. First, we never argue that the Daily Oklahoman "set the tone" for anything. Rather, we argue that international incidents could have re-shaped the campaign (pp. 27-28). Second, as previously mentioned, we did not claim to measure voter response to isolated newspaper editorials.

Harper's criticism of the methodology employed in this study suffers from an over-zealous and unrealistic concept of content analysis. He claims, essentially, that our content analysis is superficial and non-systematic, yet he neglects two important matters of research. First, he fails to realize that a detailed explanation of our content analysis would be impossible to include in a journal length

article. Second, regardless of the pretense of objectivity, all content analysis involves certain research judgments. We made these research judgments in what we believe to be an honest, context-explicit manner.

Overall, we were disappointed in the manner in which this article-response was handled. We would hope that prospective journal reviewers would set forth and abide by clear ethical and logical standards.